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ABSTRACT

The project described here evaluated the extent to which the Alexandria (Virginia) Head Start program addresses the needs of preschool English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) and provided teachers with training to enhance their students' language development. While over 40 percent of the children spoke a language other than English as their first language, none of the teachers had any formal training in ESL methodology or second language development. The training involved classroom observation, informal classroom participation of the trainer, consultation with individual staff, demonstration teaching, and classroom videotaping. Site-based training took place during the children's nap periods, and full staff inservice programs were provided. Observation and training focused on four areas: orientation to the sites and classrooms; ESL methodology, instructional practices, and second language development; additional effective classroom strategies, with extension to the home-school connection and working with families; and appreciating cultural diversity, building cross-cultural communication, and including multicultural materials in the classroom. Project activities and their results are summarized, and recommendations are made for further action. Contains 5 references. (MSE)

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Staff Training for Alexandria Head Start in ESL Methodology
A Mini-Grant from the Alexandria Early Childhood Commission (1997-98)

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Project Report

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June, 1998

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The Alexandria Head Start (AHS) program was awarded a mini grant for the school year, 1997-98, from the Alexandria Early Childhood Commission to help the staff more effectively work with ESL children and their parents. This report reviews the project in relation to its stated goals and time line, documents the activities provided, evaluates their effectiveness, and makes recommendations to further improve the language development of ESL children and families.

Project Goals

Currently, over 40% of the AHS children speak a language other than English as their primary language, yet none of the staff have had any formal training in ESL methodologies or second language development. The general goal of the project was to "accelerate language development in the ESL population by providing the staff with the necessary skills and abilities" (proposal, 1997 p. 2). This was divided into two specific goals.

> Goal 1: To accelerate the language development of the Alexandria head Start ESL students by increasing the knowledge and skills of the Head Start Staff regarding ESL Methodology.
>
> Goal 2: To provide the Alexandria Head Start staff with the skills and abilities to support and respect the native cultures of the ESL students while helping them acclimate to the U.S. culture.

These goals were implemented by training the staff in the areas of second language and culture as they relate to preschool ESL children. This training project reflected the model suggested by Helen Nissani in "Early Childhood Programs for Language Minority Students" (1993).

> Educators working with young language minority (LM) children need to be sensitive to the cultural and linguistic needs of these children. Staff development training should include hands-on experiences with appropriate practices, concrete examples

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> illustrating the design of various models of early childhood practice [for LM children], and imaginative activities designed to assist teachers in the creation of the program, curriculum, and learning environment [for LM children]. Strategies to promote positive home-school relationships should be included in in-service training for all early childhood educators. Also, training in cross-cultural communication will help practitioners interact with language minority children and their families.

The three topics she identifies--classroom practices, home-school relationships, and cross-cultural communication--served as our three training areas. The project has addressed its stated goals.

Project Time line, Staffing, and Budget

This training project was proposed for September, 1997 - April, 1998. Instead, it ran from January - May, 1998. All planned activities from the original proposal (and more) were accomplished in a shorter, more concentrated time period. The reason for this shift was that Ms. Roberta Schlicher, the ESL specialist identified in the original proposal, became unavailable in September due to a job change.

In December, 1997, AHS contracted with Dr. Betty Ansin Smallwood, an ESL specialist and teacher educator, to implement this project. Dr. Smallwood has been an ESL classroom teacher for over 20 years and currently works as a Research and Program Associate at the Center for Applied Linguistics, in Washington, D.C. (Her full resume was reviewed by the AHS Director and is on file.) She agreed to complete the project by the end of the 1997-98 school year, which she has done. She accomplished this by devoting about one to two days per week from January to March, and about one day per week in April. Project activities were largely completed by the end of April and will end in June. Dr. Smallwood has submitted monthly invoice statements to the AHS Director which document project activities and use of time. Costs (consultant time, travel, and supplies) have remained within budget.

Training Components and Activities

Dr. Smallwood worked collaboratively with the AHS Director, Ms. Angie Godfrey, and the Educational Coordinator, Ms. Angela Branch, to develop the training model into specific and sequential components that reflected the goals and outline of grant proposal. With an emphasis on classroom-based training, four rounds of observations/consultations were planned and carried out. Dr. Smallwood used a participant observer model, which combined formal observation, informal class participation, casual communication with students, informal interviews with staff, consultations with individual staff, review of classroom materials, demonstration teaching, and video taping (at later visits). Site-based training was integrated into three of the four rounds and took place in the afternoons, when the children were napping. Three rounds of observations were either introduced or culminated in full staff in-services. The workshops reported a synthesis of best practices from the different sites, involved the staff in hands-on, cooperative learning, and also demonstrated new classroom strategies and materials, all on the focus for the particular round. Evaluations were conducted after the in-services for feedback. The agendas, handouts, and evaluations for the in-services and site-based training agendas and handouts were submitted to Ms. Angela Godfrey. Sample copies are also enclosed with this report.

Each round of observations/consultations had a particular focus. The first round was intended as a brief orientation to all the sites and classrooms. The second round concentrated on ESL methodology, instructional practices, and second language development. The third round continued an emphasis on effective classroom strategies for young ESL children but extended the focus to the home-school connection and working with ESL families. The fourth round concentrated on appreciating cultural diversity, building cross-cultural communication, and including multicultural

materials in the classroom.

The in-service for this fourth round was a panel presentation by three ESL parents, from Ghana, Pakistan, and El Salvador, with follow-up discussion. Teachers contributed questions of interest during their site-training (e.g. How do you discipline in your culture? What are the roles of parents in a child's education? What was your biggest cultural adjustment when coming to the U.S.?). Dr. Smallwood and Ms. Branch coordinated this teacher input to plan the program and create focused questions for the panelists. Ms. Branch, in consultation with other AHS staff, selected the parent panelists; Dr. Smallwood helped prepare them and served as moderator. Dr. Smallwood planned and led the other two in-services by herself.

Dr. Smallwood consulted about twice a month with Ms. Branch to provide her ongoing feedback and to get her advice on ESL training needs for AHS staff and learning issues for ESL children. Dr. Smallwood also had an initial planning meeting with Ms. Godfrey in December and a mid-project evaluation with Ms. Godfrey and Ms. Branch in February to review the completed project activities and to refine planning for the second half.

Summary of Project Activities

Round 1: Orientation and First Staff Training

Date	**Purposes**	**School Site**	**Classrooms/Staff**
January 6	Observe/consult	John Adams	all 4
January 7	Observe/consult	MV/GW	all 4
January 12	Observe/consult	Jefferson Houston	all 4
January 23	**Staff In-Service**	John Adams	all AHS staff

Round 2: ESL Methodology, Instructional Practices, and Second Language Development

Date	Purposes	School Site	Classrooms
January 27	Observe/consult Site-based training	Jefferson Houston	all 4 teachers
February 3	Observe/consult Site-based training	MV and GW George Washington	all 4 teachers
February 10	Observe/consult Site-based training	John Adams	3/4 teachers and aides

Round 3: ESL Methodology and Connecting with ESL Families. Individual classroom focus

Date	Purposes	School Site	Classrooms
February 20	Observe/consult Video tape Site-based training	John Adams	mostly Ms. B's teachers and aides
February 23	Observe/consult Video tape Site-based training	Jefferson Houston	mostly Mr. C. Mr. C and aide
February 27	**Staff In-Service**	George Washington	all AHS staff

Round 4: Multicultural Materials, Cultural Diversity and Cross-Cultural Communication

Date	Purposes	School Site	Classrooms/Staff
March 10	Observe/consult Evaluate mc materials Site-based training	John Adams	all 4 all 4 teachers and aides
March 24	Observe/consult Video tape Evaluate mc materials Site-based training	Jefferson Houston	all 4 2/4 classrooms all 4 aides
March 31	Observe/consult video tape Evaluate mc materials Site-based training	George Washington	2/3 classrooms 2/3 classrooms all 3 all teachers

April 3	**Staff In-Service**	John Adams	all AHS staff
April 17	Observe/consult video tape evaluate mc materials site-based training	Mount Vernon	single classroom **note**: this full-day site-visit combined foci of R 2, 3, and 4

Reflections/Analysis (Note the use of 1st person narrative in this section.)

Classroom-based observations.

It took a while for teachers to feel comfortable with me, a total stranger, and to understand my role. The participant observer model seemed most appropriate, as it allowed me to move easily among many roles: observing, participating, reviewing material, informally interviewing staff and students, giving advice. By the 2nd to 3rd visits, teachers began to come to me with questions about their ESL children and families and to use me as an ESL resource. I observed many excellent practices among the Head Start teachers and aides that were helpful for second language acquisition (e.g. morning and circle routines, teachers' modified use of language, hands-on learning with realia, lunch table conversations among students and teachers). The ESL students appeared to comfortable in their classes and with their teachers and engaged in most of the activities, although they could have benefitted from more repetitions (of songs and stories) and additional small group reinforcement of whole group activities.

About half of the teachers were reluctant to be videotaped, even though AHS had approved its use for this training project. I did not pursue this reluctance, and focused the videotaping on those teachers that were excited about it and viewed it as the learning opportunity that it truly is for both students and teachers. For example, one teacher asked to review the video tape with her students. They loved watching themselves and it emerged into an excellent opportunity for authentic language and vocabulary development. Some of the ESL children even began to discuss and critique their

learning experience.

I observed an uneven amount of multicultural materials displayed in the classrooms and did not have clear indications of its full use. African and African-American cultures seemed most fully represented (in pictures and books), while Hispanic, Mid-Eastern and Asian cultures seemed less well represented. In addition, I did not observe multicultural and diverse perspectives systematically being included in the curriculum.

Site-based staff training.

Much training occurred organically during the hours that I spent in the classrooms. I was able to informally give teachers feedback and affirmation of instructional practices that were especially helpful for second language development (e.g. repetitions and restatements) and affirm the inclusion of multicultural classroom materials (e.g. wooden puzzles of families from different cultural backgrounds).

The plan for small group, site-based training worked fairly well. On the positive side, teachers seemed to appreciate and find useful the immediate feedback, and I could tailor my suggestions for their individual students, classrooms and school community. On the negative side, the designated time for training (during the children's nap time) took teachers and aides away from their planning and break time. In addition, I was not successful in getting the teachers to do additional adapting or planning for the ESL students beyond this group training time.

In-Service Training Workshops.

I used these workshops to develop skills and knowledge about ESL but also to encourage reflective practice among the teachers and other staff. I observed many dedicated, kind, and skilled teachers throughout AHS. However, they did not seem trained in reflecting on their practice. Nor

did they seem aware of many of the good things they were doing, and how some of these practices and strategies were helpful for their ESL learners. Therefore, I spent about half of the workshop time giving positive feedback about individual teachers to the whole group, identifying and showcasing their model instructional practices that worked well for ESL learners. Not only did this increase the teachers' self-confidence, but it also gave them a framework to do more of the same. In other words, by becoming aware of the good things one does, one can do more of them. The use of videotapes in the inservice training was particularly effective in accomplishing this goal. Of course, I asked the individual teacher's permission to show their videotape to the whole group beforehand. Both agreed.

I used this inductive, classroom-based approach throughout the workshops. For example, by building on what worked in their classrooms, I was able to explain why (i.e. provide short theoretical and research-based explanations) and also introduce new strategies and ideas to help ESL children and their families.

Teachers seemed receptive to the workshops, and their evaluations were positive. They seemed to especially like and commented on the active, cooperative learning, pair and small group activities, and the new strategies and materials demonstrated. Watching and commenting on the videotapes (in Workshop #2) received the most positive comments of all. (Sets of the evaluations were given to Ms. Branch.)

Conclusion

Overall, this was a successful training project, given its short time span. One can reasonably conclude that it accomplished its goals (see page 1). The classroom-based approach and participant observation model seemed particularly appropriate for site-based training. And the full staff responded well to the inductive and interactive in-services. The ESL children seem engaged,

comfortable, and integrated into the Alexandria Head Start program. They appear to be making good progress.

This training project probably worked better (for the consultant and the staff) with its more concentrated focus, i.e weekly rather than bi-weekly visits. However, one cannot expect staff untrained in ESL and busy with other obligations to fully learn all they truly need know in five months of training spread over 12 classrooms and 4 sites.

With the ESL preschool population continuing to multiply, increased training oportunities seem all the more important. Kagan and Garcia (1991) estimate that there will be 5.2 million preschoolers from other than English-speaking homes in the United States by the year 2000. Patton Tabors (1997) anticipates that "a large percentage of these preschoolers will be Spanish speaking, but that a myriad of other languages will be represented as well" (p. 3). AHS is in the mainstream with these national trends. I conclude, as does Tabors (1997), that "Planning ways to effectively serve these [ESL] preschoolers is now a major challenge for preschool educators" (p. 3).

Recommendations (a Baker's dozen!)

1. Continue ESL training for Alexandria Head Start staff.

2. Provide ongoing classroom support for ESL learners, through trained ESL teachers or aides. Ideally some of this ESL staff should be bilingual, representing the major language groups of the AHS ESL families.

3. Recommend multicultural children's literature and other quality literature and explain ways it can be used to stimulate both 2nd language development and cross-cultural understanding in young children. Buy some good books.

4. Increase the use of multicultural materials in the classrooms. Include material from the major cultural groups of all students, ESL and other. Train teachers to include multicultural perspectives into the lessons and curriculum. The Head Start Multicultural Task Force (1989) states that "multicultural programming incorporates approaches that validate and build upon the culture and strengths of the child and family" (p. 1).

5. Edit the videotapes collected during this training project and combine them into a single videotape that demonstrates model practices for preschool ESL learning. Develop a companion teacher's guide to accompany the video tape for training or self-study (sample of this was developed by BAS for workshop #2).

6. Encourage ongoing reflective practice among AHS staff. The more one is able to identify what is effective about one's practice, the more likely that those effective elements will be repeated and expanded. Dialogue journals are one means to do this. Observations of another teacher's classroom with a planned format for feedback are another way to develop reflective practice.

7. Integrate issues, topics, approaches, and strategies appropriate for ESL learners into the overall Head Start curriculum. In other words, consider the needs of ESL learners in the total program. With 40% of the AHS population coming from a second language background, it seems important to include an ESL specialist on any curriculum planning team.

8. Continue to follow an inclusion (push-in) rather than a pull-out model for ESL instruction, if and when ESL classroom support becomes available.

9. Continue to work closely with ESL families to help them understand the AHS program and find specific ways to make them feel welcome in the schools. For example, invite them to share food, clothing, songs, or stories from their culture.

10. Continue to develop cross-cultural communication and understanding among the AHS staff and the ESL families. This is a long, important, and two-way process. All sides need to feel affirmed and appreciated. The panel of ESL parents (Workshop #3) was a good start.

11. Invite researchers to study the language acquisition, psychological, and socio-cultural adjustment processes of selected ESL students and their families. The information gained from these case studies will inevitably inform and help improve practice.

12. Do a more detailed needs assessment of the ESL children in AHS. How are they performing and in what domains? Ideally, some assessment should also be done in their native language to determine overall language and cognitive development. Like the case studies, this will also inform practice.

13. Order and read <u>One Child, Two Languages. A Guide for Preschool Educators of Children Learning English as a Second Language</u>. By Patton Tabors (1997). ISBN 1-55766-272-X. Published by Paul Brooke. Tel. 1-800-638-3775. Cost: $24.95. It is the best and most current resource book I have seen on this topic.

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